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# Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001,

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at creating strong states via occupation, it should be thinking about fall-back positions if it fails at creating democracy overseas.

The United States needs to get better at state building. The U.S. military cannot avoid bearing much of the implied burden, like it or not. Read *State Building* for a thoughtful introduction to the challenges involved.

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Coll, Steve. *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*. New York: Penguin, 2004. 695pp. \$29.95

The events of 9/11 led many in the United States to wonder what had actually led up to that fateful day. Who was to blame? How could the United States, with its multibillion-dollar intelligence and defense budgets, have allowed such a thing to happen? In *Ghost Wars*, Steve Coll provides a useful, if overly long, chronology and analysis of pivotal events, missteps, indecision, apathy, and ultimately tragedy up to the day before the attacks.

Coll, who served as the managing editor for the *Washington Post* until 2004, was the paper's South Asia bureau chief from 1989 to 1992. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1990 for his reporting on South Asia, and he has been a keen observer of events in the region. He begins his story with the burning of the U.S. embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, in November 1979 and traces the long road of events to 11 September. It was shortly after the riots in Islamabad that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, in December 1979.

As he weaves his narrative, Coll meticulously documents every player and agenda in this drama. Coll divides the book into three parts. In the first he discusses the Soviet occupation from December 1979 to February 1989. It is here that we are introduced to mujahedeen leaders Ahmed Shah Massoud, Hamid Karzai, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and Osama Bin Laden. One also becomes acquainted with key players in the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI-D) and in the Saudi monarchy who played key roles in bankrolling the resistance. The author also provides valuable insights into the U.S. policy-making process. During this period, the United States was consumed with battling the Soviet occupation, and most policy makers did not give serious thought to the repercussions of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate's growing control over aid distribution or the increasing anti-American attitudes of such rebel commanders as Hekmatyar.

Coll continues to trace events in Afghanistan after the Soviet pullout in 1989. Once the Soviets were gone, interest in a stable Afghanistan rapidly waned as other crises in the immediate post-Cold War era monopolized U.S. attention. As a result, Afghanistan fell into chaos as warlords fought each other for control of Kabul. The lack of American involvement after the Soviets withdrew left Pakistan as the primary force to manage the post-Soviet environment. The author captures the rivalries within Afghanistan, the manipulation of events by the Pakistani government, and the apathy of U.S. policy makers throughout this period.

One of the major strengths of *Ghost Wars* is how it skillfully captures the interagency debates within the U.S.

government on Afghanistan—specifically, the discussion on various debates among the CIA, the State Department, and the National Security Council—which were wide-ranging and often contentious. After reading these accounts one is left with the distinct impression that there was no overarching policy or strategy to attack al-Qa‘ida. Instead, U.S. government policy comes across as ad hoc, driven by current contingencies or spurious information about Osama Bin Laden’s whereabouts.

In the final section, Coll documents the often frantic and uncoordinated interagency campaign to find Bin Laden. Despite George Tenet’s declaration in December 1998 that the CIA was at war with al-Qa‘ida, the U.S. government as a whole never fully came to grips with the threat posed by terrorism. For many in Washington, terrorism represented only one threat among many facing the United States in the post–Cold War era. Although terrorism did elicit concern among top U.S. policy makers, it rarely moved into a sustained, interagency strategy to combat the threat.

Prospective readers of this book should be aware that it is lengthy and requires close attention. Characters and events discussed in part 1 are revisited. Coll helps the reader along with a list of principal characters at the front of the book. Despite its length, however, *Ghost Wars* will provide valuable insights for anyone working within the interagency process, as well as scholars and regional observers interested in how the United States got Afghanistan and Bin Laden so tragically wrong.

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Maurer, John H., ed. *Churchill and Strategic Dilemmas before the World Wars: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*. London: Frank Cass, 2003. 164pp. \$79.95

One of three volumes of essays (two focus on different aspects of strategy) published in Handel’s memory, this work is based on a conference held in Newport, Rhode Island. It offers four scholarly papers on Churchill’s assessment of the German naval challenge before the First World War, Pacific security and the limits of British power between the wars, Churchill and the German threat in the late 1930s, and Churchill’s views of technology. Each assesses a different aspect of Churchill’s changing role.

Editor Maurer focuses on the early 1900s’ battleship naval race with Germany. Brought in as First Lord of the Admiralty after the Agadir crisis of 1911, Winston Churchill is seen here as fully aware of the danger to Britain if its fleet were to be seriously disabled. The Admiralty tried to maintain at least a 60 percent advantage in dreadnought construction against Germany. Churchill sought to impress the Germans with the futility of trying to catch up with, let alone outbuild, Britain. Cognizant of the costs of this race, however, in 1913 he proposed a naval “holiday” to stretch out the construction of projected new ships over more time, hoping to reduce the pace. Maurer reviews the important domestic political battles that underlay this naval arms race.

Christopher Bell, who teaches history at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, assesses Churchill’s concern over the growing threat posed by Japan in the interwar years. He notes a 1928 Churchill comment that “of all the wars